

you of the cause of every one of these classes, and I shall show their utility about which there can be no doubt and to which there can be no objection. Then I shall return to each of the *commandments* comprised in the class in question and I shall explain to you the cause of it, so that only very few *commandments* will remain whose cause has not been clear to me up to now. Some of the particulars of, and conditions for, some of the *commandments* have also become clear to me, and it is possible to give their causes. You will hear all this. However, I shall not be able to clarify to you all this giving of causes before I set before you, as a preliminary, a number of chapters in which I will include premises that are useful as an introduction for the purpose I have in mind. These are the chapters with which I will begin now. |

CHAPTER 27

The Law as a whole aims at two things: the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body. As for the welfare of the soul, it consists in the multitude's acquiring correct opinions corresponding to their respective capacity. Therefore some of them [namely, the opinions] are set forth explicitly and some of them are set forth in parables. For it is not within the nature of the common multitude that its capacity should suffice for apprehending that subject matter as it is. As for the welfare of the body, it comes about by the improvement of their ways of living one with another. This is achieved through two things. One of them is the abolition of their wronging each other. This is tantamount to every individual among the people not being permitted to act according to his will and up to the limits of his power, but being forced to do that which is useful to the whole. The second thing consists in the acquisition by every human individual of moral qualities that are useful for life in society so that the affairs of the city may be ordered. Know that as between these two aims, one is indubitably greater in nobility, namely, the welfare of the soul — I mean the procuring of correct opinions — while the second aim — I mean the welfare of the body — is prior in nature and time. The latter aim consists in the governance of the city and the well-being of the states of all its people according to their capacity. This second aim is the more certain one, and it is the one regarding which every effort has been made precisely to expound it and all its particulars. For the first aim can only be achieved after achieving this second one. For it has already

been demonstrated that man has two perfections: a first perfection, which is the perfection of the body, and an ultimate perfection, which is the perfection of the soul. The first perfection | consists in being healthy and in the very best bodily state, and this is only possible through his finding the things necessary for him whenever he seeks them. These are his food and all the other things needed for the governance of his body, such as a shelter, bathing, and so forth. This cannot be achieved in any way by one isolated individual. For an individual can only attain all this through a political association, it being already known that man is political by nature. His ultimate perfection is to become rational in actu, I mean to have an intellect in actu; this would consist in his knowing everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection. It is clear that to this ultimate perfection there do not belong either actions or moral qualities and that it consists only of opinions toward which speculation has led and that investigation has rendered compulsory. It is also clear that this noble and ultimate perfection can only be achieved after the first perfection has been achieved [For a man cannot represent to himself an intelligible even when taught to understand it and all the more cannot become aware of it of his own accord, if he is in pain or is very hungry or is thirsty or is hot or is very cold. But once the first perfection has been achieved it is possible to achieve the ultimate, which is indubitably more noble and is the only cause of permanent preservation.]

The true Law then, which as we have already made clear¹ is unique — namely, the Law of *Moses our Master* — has come to bring us both perfections, I mean the welfare of the states of people in their relations with one another through the abolition of reciprocal wrongdoing and through the acquisition of a noble and excellent character. In this way the preservation of the population of the country and their permanent existence in the same order become possible, so that | every one of them achieves his first perfection; I mean also the soundness of the beliefs and the giving of correct opinions through which ultimate perfection is achieved. The letter of the *Torah* speaks of both perfections and informs us that the end of this Law in its entirety is the achievement of these two perfections. For He, may He be exalted, says: *And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes [huqqim], to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.*² Here He puts the ultimate perfection first because of its nobility; for, as we have explained, it is the ultimate end. It is referred to in the dictum: *For our good always*. You know already what [the Sages],

1. Cf. II 39. 2. Deut. 6:24.

may their memory be blessed, have said interpreting His dictum, may He be exalted: *That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.*³ They said: *That it may be well with thee in a world in which everything is well and that thou mayest prolong thy days in a world the whole of which is long.*⁴ Similarly the intention of His dictum here, *For our good always*, is this same notion: I mean the attainment of *a world in which everything is well and [the whole of which is] long*. And this is perpetual preservation. On the other hand, His dictum, [*That He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day*, refers to the first and corporeal preservation, which lasts for a certain duration and which can only be well ordered through political association, as we have explained.]

CHAPTER 28

Among the things to which your attention ought to be directed is that you should know that in regard to the correct opinions through which the ultimate perfection may be obtained, the Law has communicated only their end and made a call to believe in them in a summary way — that is, to believe in the existence of the deity, may He be exalted, His unity, His knowledge, His power, His will, and His eternity. (All these points are ultimate ends, which can be made clear in detail and through definitions only after one knows many opinions.) In the same way the Law also makes a call to adopt certain beliefs, belief in which is necessary for the sake of political welfare. Such, for instance, is our belief that He, may He be exalted, is violently angry with those who disobey Him and that it is therefore necessary to fear Him and to dread Him and to take care not to disobey. With regard to all the other correct opinions concerning the whole of being — opinions that constitute the numerous kinds of all the theoretical sciences through which the opinions forming the ultimate end are validated — the Law, albeit it does not make a call to direct attention toward them in detail as it does with regard to [the opinions forming ultimate ends], does do this in summary fashion by saying: *To love the Lord.*¹ You know how this is confirmed in the dictum regarding love: *With all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*² We have already explained in *Mishneh Torah*³ that this love becomes valid only through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is

3. Deut. 22:7. 4. B.T., Qiddushin, 39b; B.T., Hullin, 142a.

1. Deut. 11:13 and 22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, and 20.

2. Deut. 6:5. 3. Cf. Yesodei ha-Torah, II 2 f.

and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it. We have also mentioned there the fact that the *Sages, may their memory be blessed*, call attention to this notion.

What results from what we have now stated as a premise regarding this subject is that whenever a *commandment*, be it a prescription or a prohibition, requires abolishing reciprocal wrongdoing, or urging to a noble moral quality leading to a good social relationship, or communicating a correct opinion that ought to be believed either on account of itself or because it is necessary for the abolition of reciprocal wrongdoing or for the acquisition of a noble moral quality, such a *commandment* has a clear cause and is of a manifest utility. No question concerning the end need be posed with regard to such *commandments*. For no one was ever so perplexed for a day as to ask why we were commanded by the Law that God is one, or why we were forbidden | to kill and to steal, or why we were forbidden to exercise vengeance and retaliation, or why we were ordered to love each other. The matters about which people are perplexed and opinions disagree — so that some say that there is no utility in them at all except the fact of mere command, whereas others say that there is a utility in them that is hidden from us — are the *commandments* from whose external meaning it does not appear that they are useful according to one of the three notions we have mentioned: I mean to say that they neither communicate an opinion nor inculcate a noble quality nor abolish reciprocal wrongdoing. Apparently these *commandments* are not related to the welfare of the soul, as they do not communicate a belief, or to the welfare of the body, as they do not communicate rules useful for the governance of the city or for the governance of the household. Such, for instance, are the prohibitions of the *mingled stuff*, of the *mingling* [of diverse species], and of *meat in milk*,⁴ and the commandment *concerning the covering of blood, the heifer whose neck was broken*, and the *firstling of an ass*,⁵ and others of the same kind. However, you will hear my explanation for all of them and my exposition of the correct and demonstrated causes for them all with the sole exception — as I have mentioned to you — of details and particular *commandments*. I shall explain that all these and others of the same kind are indubitably related to one of the three notions referred to — either to the welfare of a belief or to the welfare of the conditions of the city, which is achieved through two things: abolition of reciprocal wrongdoing and acquisition of excellent characters.

Sum up what we have said concerning beliefs as follows: In some cases

4. Cf. Deut. 22:11; Lev. 19:19; Exod. 23:19.

5. Cf. Lev. 17:13; Deut. 21:1-9; Exod. 13:13.

a *commandment* communicates a correct belief, which is the one and only thing aimed at — as, for instance, the belief in the unity and eternity of the deity and in His not being a body. In other cases the belief is necessary for the abolition of reciprocal wrongdoing or for the acquisition of a noble moral quality — as, for instance, the belief that He, may He be exalted, has a violent anger against those who do injustice, according to what is said: *And My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill, and so on*,⁶ and as the belief that He, may He be exalted, | responds instantaneously to the prayer of someone wronged or deceived: *And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious*.⁷

CHAPTER 29

It is well known that *Abraham our Father*, peace be on him, was brought up in the religious community of the Sabians,¹ whose doctrine it is that there is no deity but the stars. When I shall have made known to you in this chapter their books, translated into Arabic, which are in our hands today, and their ancient chronicles and I shall have revealed to you through them their doctrine and histories, it will become clear to you from this that they explicitly asserted that the stars are the deity and that the sun is the greatest deity. They also said that the rest of the seven stars² are deities, but that the two luminaries³ are the greatest of them. You will find that they explicitly say that the sun governs the upper and the lower world. They say it in these very terms. And you will find that they mention in those books and those chronicles the story of *Abraham our Father*, and they say literally what follows: When Ibrahīm, who was brought up in Kūthā, disagreed with the community and asserted that there was an agent other than the sun, various arguments were brought forward against him. In these arguments they⁴ set forth the clear and manifest activities of the sun in what exists. Thereupon he, they mean *Abraham*, told them: You are right; it is like an axe in the hands of a carpenter. Then they mention a part of his

6. Exod. 22:23. 7. Exod. 22:26.

1. The term "Sabians," as used by Maimonides, designates the pagans.

2. Including the sun and the moon. Another possible translation is: all the seven stars.

3. The sun and the moon. 4. I.e., the Sabians who were Abraham's contemporaries.

argumentation, peace be on him, against them. At the conclusion of the story they mention that the king put *Abraham our Father*, may peace be upon him, into prison, and that, being in prison, he persevered | for days and days in arguing against them. Thereupon the king became afraid that he would ruin his⁵ polity and turn the people away from their religions and banished him toward Syria after having confiscated all his property. This is what they relate. You will find this story set forth in this manner in "The Nabatean Agriculture."⁶ They do not mention what is related in our true traditions, and the prophetic revelation that came to him. For they tax him with lying because of his disagreeing with their corrupt opinion. I have no doubt that in view of the fact that he, may peace be upon him, disagreed with the doctrine of all men, these erring men reviled, blamed, and belittled him. Accordingly, because he bore this for the sake of God, may He be exalted, and preferred truth to his reputation, he was told: *And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*⁷ And in point of fact his activity has resulted, as we see today, in the consensus of the greater part of the population of the earth in glorifying him and considering themselves as blessed through his memory, so that even those who do not belong to his progeny pretend to descend from him. No one is antagonistic to him or ignorant of his greatness except the remnants of this religious community that has perished, remnants that survive in the extremities of the earth, as for instance the infidels among the Turks in the extreme North and the Hindus in the extreme South. These are the remnants of the religious community of the Sabians, for this was a religious community that extended over the whole earth.

The utmost attained by the speculation of those who philosophized in those times consisted in imagining that God was the spirit of the sphere and that the sphere and the stars are a body of which the deity, may He be exalted, is its spirit. Abū Bakr Ibn al-Šā'igh⁸ has mentioned this in the commentary on the "Akroasis."⁹ Therefore all the Sabians believed in the eternity of the world, since in their opinion heaven is the deity.

They deem *Adam* to have been an individual born of male | and female like the other human individuals, but they glorify him and say that he was a prophet, the envoy¹⁰ of the moon, who called people to worship the moon, and that there are compilations of his on the cultivation of the soil. Similarly the Sabians say that *Noah* was a cultivator of the soil and that he did not

5. I.e., the king's. 6. A supposedly ancient Sabian book. Cf. this chapter below.

7. Gen. 12:3. 8. Ibn Bājjā. Cf. I 74, n. 10. 9. I.e., Aristotle's *Physics*.

10. Or: prophetic lawgiver.

approve of the worship of idols. Therefore you will find that all the Sabians blame *Noah* and say that he never worshipped an idol. They also mention in their books that he was beaten and put into prison because of his worshipping God, and tell various other tales about him. They deem that *Seth* disagreed with the opinion of his father *Adam* concerning the worship of the moon, and tell most ridiculous lies that show a great deficiency of intellect and that they are more remote from philosophy than any other men and are extremely ignorant. Of *Adam* they say that when he left the clime of the sun, which is in the vicinity of India, and came to the clime of Babylon, he brought with him marvellous things: among them a golden tree that grew and had leaves and branches, also a stone tree, and a green leaf of a tree that fire could not burn. And he spoke of a tree, of a man's stature in height, that could give shelter to ten thousand men. He also brought with him two leaves in each of which two individuals could be wrapped. They also tell fables about other marvels. It is to be wondered at that people who think that the world is eternal should at the same time believe in these things that are impossible in nature for those who have knowledge of the speculation on nature. Their purpose in mentioning *Adam* and everything they ascribe to him is to fortify their doctrine concerning the eternity of the world so that it should follow that the stars and the sphere are the deity.

However, when *the pillar of the world*¹¹ grew up and it became clear to him that there is a separate deity that is neither a body nor a force in a body and that all the stars | and the spheres were made by Him, and he understood that the fables upon which he was brought up were absurd, he began to refute their doctrine and to show up their opinions as false; he publicly manifested his disagreement with them and called *in the name of the Lord, God of the world*¹² – both the existence of the deity and the creation of the world in time by that deity being comprised in that call.

In conformity with these opinions, the Sabians set up statues for the planets,¹³ golden statues for the sun and silver ones for the moon, and distributed the minerals and the climes between the planets, saying that one particular planet was the deity of one particular clime. And they built temples, set up the statues in them, and thought that the forces of the planets overflowed toward these statues and that consequently these statues talked, had understanding, gave prophetic revelation to people – I mean, the statues – and made known to people what was useful to them. Similarly they

11. I.e., Abraham. 12. Gen. 21:33. Cf. II 13, n. 4.

13. *kawākib*. Literally: stars. In the following lines this Arabic term is rendered several times as "planets."

said of the trees, which were assigned to the various planets, that when one particular tree was set apart for one particular planet, planted with a view to the latter, and a certain treatment was applied to it and with it, the spirit of that planet overflowed toward that tree, gave prophetic revelation to people, and spoke to them in sleep. You will find all this set forth literally in their books, to which I shall draw your attention. These were *the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah* that are mentioned in our texts; among them these opinions became so firm that they *they forsook the Lord*¹⁴ and called: *O Baal, answer us*.¹⁵ All this came about because of these opinions being generally accepted, ignorance being widespread and the world then often being given to raving concerning imaginings of this kind. Accordingly such opinions developed among them that some of them became *soothsayers, enchanters, sorcerers, charmers, consultants with familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers*.¹⁶ We have already made it clear in our great compilation, | *Mishneh Torah*,¹⁷ that *Abraham our Father* began to refute these opinions by means of arguments and feeble preaching, conciliating people and drawing them to obedience by means of benefits. Then the Master of the prophets¹⁸ received prophetic inspiration; thereupon he perfected the purpose in that he commanded killing these people, wiping out their traces, and tearing out their roots: *Ye shall break down their altars, and so on*,¹⁹ and forbade following those ways of theirs in anything: *And ye shall not walk in the customs [huqqoth] of the nation, and so on*.²⁰ You know from texts of the *Torah* figuring in a number of passages that the first intention of the Law as a whole is to put an end to *idolatry*, to wipe out its traces and all that is bound up with it, even its memory as well as all that leads to any of its works — as, for instance, *familiar spirits* and a *wizard* and *making to pass through fire*, a *diviner*, a *soothsayer*, an *enchanter*, a *sorcerer*, a *charmer*, and a *necromancer* — and to warn against doing anything at all similar to their works and, all the more, against repeating the latter. It is explicitly stated in the text of the *Torah* that everything that was regarded by them as worship of their gods and as a way of coming near to them, is hateful and odious to God. This is stated in His saying: *For every abomination to the Lord, which He hateth, have they done unto their gods*.²¹ You will find that in their books, about which I shall give you information, they mention that under certain circumstances they offer to the sun, their highest deity, seven beetles, seven mice, and seven bats. This alone is sufficient to arouse

14. Cf. Isa. 1:4. 15. I Kings 18:26. 16. Cf. Deut. 18:10–11.

17. Cf. 'Abodah Zarah, I 3. 18. I.e., Moses.

19. Judg. 2:2. Cf. Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5. 20. Lev. 20:23. 21. Deut. 12:31.

disgust in human nature. Consequently all the *commandments* that are concerned with the prohibition against *idolatry* and everything that is connected with it or leads toward it or may be ascribed to it, are of manifest utility, for all of them are meant to bring about deliverance from these unhealthy opinions that turn one's attention away from all that is useful with regard to the two perfections toward the crazy notions | in which our fathers and forefathers were brought up: *Your fathers dwelt of old time on the other side of the river, even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods.*²² It is about these notions that the truthful prophets have said:²³ *For they walked after vain things that do not profit.* How great then is the utility of every *commandment* that delivers us from this great error and brings us back to the correct belief: namely, that there is a deity who is the Creator of all this; that it is He who ought to be worshipped and loved and feared and not the things that are deemed to be gods; and that to come near to this true deity and to obtain His good will, nothing is required that is fraught with any hardship whatever, the only things needed being *love of Him and fear of Him* and nothing else. For these two are, as we shall explain, the end of divine worship: *And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, and so on.*²⁴ We shall exhaust this subject in the sequel.

I shall now return to my purpose and say that the meaning of many of the laws became clear to me and their causes became known to me through my study of the doctrines, opinions, practices, and cult of the Sabians, as you will hear when I explain the reasons for the *commandments* that are considered to be without cause. I shall mention to you the books from which all that I know about the doctrines and opinions of the Sabians will become clear to you so that you will know for certain that what I say about the reasons for these laws is correct.

The most important book about this subject is "The Nabatean Agriculture" translated by Ibn Wahshiyya.²⁵ In a future chapter I shall let you know why the Sabians treated their doctrines and agriculture in the same work. This book is filled with the ravings of the *idolaters* and with notions to which the souls of the vulgar incline and by which they are captivated — I mean the actions | of talismans, practices with a view to causing spirits to descend, demons, and ghouls living in deserts. In this book are also included

22. Josh. 24:2.

23. The following quotation amalgamates two passages: I Sam. 12:21, and Jer. 2:8.

24. Deut. 10:12.

25. Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn ʿAlī Ibn Wahshiyya seems to have been the author of this work, which he passed off as a translation from the Chaldean. The work appeared in 904.

extraordinary ravings laughed at by the intelligent, which are thought to depreciate the manifest miracles through which the people of the earth know that there is a deity governing the people of the earth; as it says: *That thou mayest know that the earth is the Lord's*,²⁶ and: *That I am the Lord in the midst of the earth*.²⁷ Accordingly it is related there about *Adam, the first man*, that he recounts in his book that in India there is a tree whose branches, if taken and thrown on the earth, move, crawling as snakes do; and also that there is another tree there whose root has a human form; this root may be heard to growl and to emit isolated words. He also narrates that if a man take a leaf of an herb, whose description is given, and puts it against his breast,²⁸ he becomes hidden from people and is not seen wherever he comes in or goes out. If this herb is used in fumigations under the open sky, people hear a sound and fearsome voices in the atmosphere while the smoke rises. There are many such fables in the book, told in the course of setting forth information about marvels in plants and the properties of agriculture; in this way the miracles are criticized and the suggestion made that they are worked by means of tricks. In one of the fables figuring in that book, it is mentioned that an althea bush, which was one of the *asheroth*²⁹ that they used, as I have let you know, remained for twelve thousand years in *Nineveh*; that it quarreled with a mandragora because of the latter's wanting to take its place; that the individual who used to receive prophetic revelation from that tree was deprived of that revelation for a while. After that interval of time, it informed him by such a revelation | that it had been preoccupied with the quarrel with the mandragora and ordered him to write to the Chaldeans asking them to judge between them and to pronounce which of them — the althea or the mandragora — was better for, and more frequently utilized in, their magic. This is a long fable, from which, if you examine it, you may draw inferences concerning the intellect and the sciences of the people of those times. Such were the *Sages of Babylon* that are referred to in those dark times. For these were the religious beliefs upon which they were brought up. If the belief in the existence of the deity were not generally accepted at present to such an extent in the religious communities, our days in these times would be even darker than that epoch. However, their darkness is of different kinds. I am, however, returning to our subject.

In that book it is related that an individual from among the *prophets of idolatry*, named *Tammuz*, called upon a king to worship the seven

26. Exod. 9:29. 27. Exod. 8:18. 28. Or: in his pocket.

29. A biblical Hebrew word that Maimonides applies to trees that have been consecrated to gods.

planets³⁰ and the twelve signs of the Zodiac. Thereupon that king killed him in an abominable manner. It is narrated that on the night of his death all the statues from the various countries of the earth assembled in the temple in Babylon, near the great golden statue, which was the statue of the sun. This statue was suspended between heaven and earth. And it came to a stop in the middle of the temple, while all the other statues surrounded it. Then it began to eulogize *Tammuz* and to relate what had happened to him, and all the statues wept and lamented during the whole of the night. In the morning, however, the statues flew away and returned to their temples in the various countries of the earth. And this became an enduring traditional custom to lament and weep over *Tammuz* on the first day of the month of *Tammuz*. The women weep over him and eulogize him. Consider then and understand and see what were the opinions of the people in those times. For this | story of *Tammuz* is very ancient among the Sabians. And from this book you will understand most of the ravings, practices, and festivals of the Sabians.

As for the story they tell about *Adam* and the *serpent and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, a story that also alludes to unusual clothing, take great care not to be confused in your intellect in such a way as to have the notion that what they say is a thing that has ever happened to *Adam* or to somebody else. For it is by no means a story concerning something real. With very little reflection it will become clear to you that all that they set forth in this fable is absurd and that it is a story that they put out after the promulgation of the *Torah*. For when the *Torah* had become generally known among the religious communities³¹ and they³² had heard the external meaning of the *Account of the Beginning*, taking the whole of it according to its external meaning, they concocted this story in order that inexperienced people should listen to it and be so deceived as to think that the world is eternal and that the story described in the *Torah* happened the way they tell it. Even though a man like you does not have to have his attention drawn to this point—as you have already acquired such sciences as will prevent your mind from becoming attached to the fables of the Sabians and the ravings of the Chasdeans and Chaldeans who are devoid of all science that is truly a science—I have warned against this in order to safeguard others, for the multitude frequently incline to regarding fables as the truth.

Among these books there is also the book of al-Ustumākhus that is ascribed to Aristotle,³³ but he cannot have written it; also books concerning

30. Literally: stars. 31. Or: nations. 32. I.e., the Sabians.

33. This pseudo-Aristotelian work exists in manuscript.

talismans like the book of Tumtum, the book al Sarb, and the Book of the Degrees of the Sphere and the Forms Appearing in Each of These Degrees; also a book concerning talismans that is likewise attributed to Aristotle, a book | ascribed to Hermes, and the book written by Ishāq al-Šābi on the defense of the religious community of the Sabians, and the big book of this same author concerning the laws of the Sabians, the details of their religion, their festivals, their sacrifices, their prayers, and other matters belonging to their religion. All the books that I have mentioned to you are *books of idolatry* that have been translated into Arabic. But there is no doubt that they are but a very small part of this literature if compared to the writings that have not been translated and are not even extant, but have perished and been lost in the course of the years. However, the books extant among us to-day contain an exposition of the greatest part of the opinions and the practices of the Sabians; some of the latter are generally known at present in the world. I mean the building of temples, the setting-up in them of images made of cast metal and stone, the building of altars and the offering-up upon them of either animal sacrifices or various kinds of food, the institution of festivals, the gatherings for prayer and for various kinds of worship in those temples in which they locate highly venerated places that are called by them the temple of the intellectual forms, as well as the setting-up of images *upon the high mountains, and so on*,³⁴ the veneration of those *asheroth*,³⁵ the setting-up of *monumental stones*, and other matters of which you will learn in the books to which I have drawn your attention. The knowledge of these opinions and practices is a very important chapter in the exposition of the reasons for the *commandments*. For the foundation of the whole of our Law and the pivot around which it turns, consists in the effacement of these opinions from the minds and of these monuments from existence. With respect to their effacement from the minds, it says: *Lest your heart be deceived, and so on*,³⁶ *Whose heart turneth away this day, and so on*,³⁷ and with respect to their effacement from existence, it says: *Ye shall break down their altars . . . and hew down their groves, and so on*,³⁸ *And destroy their name out of that place*.³⁹ | These two purposes are reiterated in a number of passages. For this is the first intention extending over the whole of the Law, as is made known to us by [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed*, in their transmitted commentary on His dictum, may He be exalted: *Even all that the Lord hath commanded you by the hand of Moses*.⁴⁰ For they say:

34. Deut. 12:2.

35. Cf. n. 29, this chap.

36. Deut. 11:16.

37. Deut. 29:17.

38. Deut. 7:5.

39. Deut. 12:3.

40. Num. 15:23.

*Herefrom you may learn that everyone who professes idolatry, disbelieves in the Torah in its entirety; whereas he who disbelieves in idolatry, professes the Torah in its entirety.*⁴¹ Cognize this.

CHAPTER 30

When you consider these ancient and unhealthy opinions, it will become clear to you that among all men it was an accepted view that through the worship of stars the earth becomes populated and the soil fertile. Their men of knowledge, as well as the ascetics and the men of piety among them, preached this to the people and taught them that agriculture, on which the existence of man depends, can only be perfected and succeed according to wish if you worship the sun and the stars; if you anger them through disobedience, the land will become barren and devastated. In their books they say that Jupiter had been angry with the wildernesses and the deserts and that they therefore lacked water and lacked trees and were inhabited by ghouls. They had a very great esteem for the peasants and the cultivators of the soil because of their being engaged in cultivating the earth, an occupation that conforms to the will of the stars and pleases them. The reason why the *idolators* had a great esteem for oxen was the utility of the latter in agriculture. They even said that it was not permitted to kill them because force was joined in them | to handiness for man in agriculture; the oxen only acted thus and submitted to man in spite of their force because the gods were pleased with their work in agriculture. Inasmuch as these opinions were generally accepted, [the idolaters] connected *idolatry* with agriculture, the latter being necessary for the subsistence of man and of most animals. Accordingly the *priests of idolatry* preached to the people during their assemblies in the temples and fortified in their minds the notion that through the practices of this cult, rains would fall, the trees would bear fruit, and the land would become fertile and populous. Consider what they say in "The Nabatean Agriculture"¹ in the passage on the vineyard; you will find there the following text of the Sabians: All the ancient sages have said and the prophets have commanded and prescribed to play on musical

41. Siphre to Num. 15:23; B.T., Horayoth, 8a; B.T., Qiddushin, 40a. The subject is dealt with by Maimonides in *Mishneh Torah*, 'Abodah Zarah, II 4.

1. This work is referred to in the preceding chapter.